



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

GUEST OPINION ARTICLE

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*This guest opinion is by State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D.
Length: Approximately 330 words*

Vaccination Is an Act of Love **By State Health Officer Terry Dwelle, M.D.**

Immunizations save lives. In fact – other than safe drinking water – no public health intervention in history has saved more lives.

It's hard to believe, but there was a time when parents watched their children get sick and die from diseases that many people today know little about – diseases like diphtheria that killed more than 15,000 American children in 1921. They watched helplessly as their children were crippled or spent their days in an iron lung to help them breathe because of polio, which used to cause between 13,000 and 20,000 cases of paralytic polio in the U.S. each year. Today, thankfully, vaccines protect our children from these and other serious diseases.

Recently, the federal government reached a settlement with a Georgia family who said that their child was harmed by vaccinations she had received. According to news reports, the child had an underlying medical condition that may have been aggravated by the vaccines, triggering autistic-like symptoms.

It's important to remember, however, that the case recently in the news does not prove a link between vaccines and autism. This was a legal opinion, not a scientific study. In fact, at least 16 studies into vaccines and autism have found no link between the two.

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As a pediatrician, I have worked with many families struggling with the difficult effects of autism. I'm hopeful that current and future research will provide answers to these parents and families.

We know that no vaccine is 100 percent safe, but the benefits of vaccination – preventing serious diseases and deaths – outweigh the possibility of side effects. I encourage parents to talk to their child's doctor if they have any questions about vaccinations.

Making sure our children are vaccinated is one of the most important ways we can help them grow up healthy and strong. Vaccination truly is an act of love.

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